ACCESION OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO TO THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY — A THREAT TO REGIONAL SECURITY OR AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PEACEBUILDING PROCESS?

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Abstract

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation founded in 1999. It has proved to be successful in improving the economic growth of its member states; it also supports the security of individual member states and the stability of the entire region. The stabilisation capabilities of the Community have been tested through the accession of South Sudan in 2016. The experience of the past six years indicates that the decision to admit South Sudan into the community should be assessed positively, especially in terms of the peacebuilding process in this state. On the 8th April 2022, the Democratic Republic of Congo was admitted to the EAC. Anchoring in a regional block that has been proving its stability for over a dozen years can reduce poverty and spur development in the DRC, both in terms of its economic and political dimensions. This, in turn, in a favourable political environment, can in the future translate into good governance and the building of civil society. For the East African Community, however, the accession of the Democratic Republic of Congo poses a major challenge. The DRC brings a number of unresolved political problems, raising questions about whether the potential gains will outweigh the threat to the stability of the region and the maintenance of the current pace of integration processes. The aim of the article is to try to answer questions about the causes and potential consequences of the decision to carry out this surprising accession process. The analysis presented, a brief case study, attempts to explain that the political rationale behind this decision is not justified by geographical and historical considerations.

Keywords

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, The East African Community, peacebuilding process, regional integration, East Africa

Introduction

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation considered to be one of the most advanced in achieving its integration objectives (Lizak
The EAC was meant as the reactivation and expansion of an earlier organisation founded in 1967 by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The founding treaty of the Community was signed on November 30, 1999, and entered into force on July 7, 2000, after ratification by the three founding countries, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The main goal of the organization is to strive to build a prosperous, competitive, secure, stable, and politically united East Africa. The Community promotes four pillars of integration: a customs union, a common market, a monetary union, and—in the future—a political federation. The Protocol on the creation of a customs union was signed in 2004, the customs union entered into force for a transitional period in 2005, fully in force since 2010. The Protocol on the creation of a common market was signed in 2009 and entered into force in 2010. Work is currently underway to implement plans for the creation of the East African Monetary Union, EAMU (About EAC…).

Unlike its predecessor, which collapsed in 1978, not only has the contemporary Community been operating stably for over 20 years (contemporary with Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda as a member states), but it has also proved to be successful in improving the economic growth of its member states.

Simultaneously, it supports the internal and national security of individual member states and the stability of the entire region. In recent years, the stabilisation capabilities of the Community have been tested through the accession of South Sudan (2016), which contributed to the Community not only rich crude oil deposits and water resources, but also a heavy burden of political issues in the form of both domestic conflicts and unresolved international problems such as a border conflict with the Republic of (north) Sudan. The experience of the past six years indicates however, that the decision to admit South Sudan into the community should be viewed positively, especially in terms of the peacebuilding process in this state.

On the 8th April 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was admitted to the EAC (The Democratic Republic…). Anchoring in a politically strong, stable, and prosperous regional block, which has been proving its stability for over twenty years, can help to reduce poverty and spur development in the DRC, both in terms of its economic and sociopolitical dimensions. This, in turn, in a favourable political environment, can in the future translate into good governance and the building of civil society (Collier 2009). The latter in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as in many other African countries, still remains at the level of the official rhetoric of the authorities rather than the actual consciousness of the citizens, who often still place ethnic, clan, or family identity above any sense of national belonging and civic duties.

For the East African Community, however, the accession of the Democratic Republic of the Congo poses a major challenge. As in the case of the Republic of South Sudan, in addition to its rich natural resource deposits, the DRC brings a number of unresolved political problems, raising concerns about whether the potential gains will outweigh the threat to the stability of the region and striving to maintain of the current pace of integration processes. The continuing instability in eastern Congo, fuelled over the past decade by the activities of the M23 Movement fighting the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), remains unresolved (Zapata 2012). Similarly unresolved are the accusations levelled against Rwanda, accusing it of interfering in the internal affairs of the DRC to pursue its own political interests (Ferrando 2022). The DRC’s serious economic problems or the seemingly mundane issue of the official language are also not insignificant.
The analysis presented, a short case study, attempts to explain the political rationale behind this decision, which is not justified by geographical and historical considerations. For understandable reasons, related to the recent date of accession, it will not be possible to give a firm answer to questions concerning the ultimate consequences of the DRC’s accession to the EAC. Instead, it is possible to present the likely causes and potential consequences of the decision to proceed with the accession process; an analysis of these issues is the main objective of this article.

The main point of reference and the basic unit of analysis is the state, one of the fundamental subjects of research in political science and international relations. In parallel, the importance of regionalism and integration processes, which significantly shape the development of individual states and the economic stability of the region as a whole, was emphasised (Mania, Grabowski, Mormul 2018). In line with political change theory (and the concepts of modernisation and dependent development theory that refer to it), questions were raised about the determinants of the process of change and subsequent stabilisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — with reference to the external (in this case) determinants of the transformation of institutions, the political system, and democratisation processes (Sobolewska-Myślik 1994, 39).

The adopted research objective indirectly determined the choice of research method. A case study was chosen as a method dominated by a qualitative strategy, appreciating the importance of the broad contextualisation of events and the uniqueness of the object under study, combined with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the problem (Yin 2009).

This choice had a direct impact on the structure of the article and its chronological and problematic arrangement. The starting point of the analysis was the genesis of the so-called Great Lakes Region crisis, whose trigger was the influx of Rwandan refugees in mid-1994. This was followed by a presentation of the course of the conflict and the stabilisation initiatives of the international community, neighbouring countries and, representing their interests, the EAC. Attempts at post-conflict reconstruction of the DRC are then presented. In both cases, highlighting the long-standing period of instability was deemed necessary to explain the international atmosphere, in which the need to restore lasting stability in the region was considered one of the main reasons for the decision to admit the DRC to the EAC.

The basis for this text is the literature on the subject (concerning, in particular, the origins and course of the Great Lakes region crisis) and material obtained from sources and studies on the Internet, including particular data available on the official websites of the EAC (http://www.eac.int/) and the UN and EU stabilisation missions. It should be noted that in the Polish scientific literature there is no coherent study devoted to the genesis and course of the so-called The Great Lakes region crisis, although, of course, there is no shortage of works of a contributory nature, devoted to individual stages and selected aspects of the conflict. A relevant review of the literature on the subject, both Polish and foreign language, is included in the bibliographical index.
The Great Lakes region crisis and the efforts of the international community to end it

The crisis in the Great Lakes region has seriously affected the stability of the western borders of the westernmost EAC member states Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi for nearly three decades. The contemporary political instability in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has its direct origin in the events of the 1990s, although the premises of contemporary conflicts can be found both in the errors in the demarcation of the Congolese-Rwandan border during the early colonial period (Prunier 2009; Bar 2014, 259–278) and in the serious neglect of the many years of the leadership of Mobutu Sese Seko (Mobutu’s regime…).

The immediate cause of the crisis in eastern Congo, however, was the sudden, massive influx of Rwandan refugees in mid-1994, when the perpetrators of the genocide and the Hutu population – fearing repression – fled from the Rwandan Patriotic Front defending the Tutsi population. The appearance in the Congo, then Zaire, of the two million Hutu refugees, seriously damaged the fragile stability of the state, which had been mired in a political and economic crisis for years. The command of the former Rwandan army, which strengthened its position due to the appropriation of the state treasury from Rwanda, and then taking over material aid for refugees, managed to rebuild military troops of 50,000. As early as December 1994, the first armed attacks by Hutu militias against the Tutsi population living in the Rwandan border regions took place. In early 1995, regular battles were fought on the border between Zaire and Rwanda (Meredith 2011, 468).

There was then a multiplication of interrelated levels of conflict; a crisis that was initially an internal conflict turned into an international conflict when the Rwandan and Ugandan authorities intervened to defend the threatened western borderlands of both countries. Subsequently, other countries in the region joined the intervention.

These events marked the beginning of the two Congolese wars – so called the Great Lakes region (East African Lakes…) crisis — fought with varying degrees of intensity over the next eight years, until 2002, when the Peace Accord was signed in Pretoria (South Africa). In total, the two phases of the conflict lasted 7 years, caused the deaths of 3 million people, involved the troops of 9 African countries and more than a dozen rebel groups (Prunier 2010; Pawelczak 2006).

Despite the hard-won agreement reached, among other things, thanks to the mediation of South Africa and the African Union (AU) as well as the presence of stabilisation missions established on behalf of the United Nations (Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo – MONUC) (MONUC…), Mission de l’Organization des Nations Unies pour la stabilization en République démocratique du Congo – MONUSCO (MONUSCO…) and the European Union (Operation Artemis, later: European Union Force Democratic Republic of the Congo (EUFOR RD Congo) (EUFOR RD Congo…), conducted in cooperation with the United Nations, peace did not return to these areas.

In the following years, internal rebellions continued to smoulder, causing the need for interventions led by neighbouring states threatened with loss of their own stability – Uganda and, above all, Rwanda. In 2012, a grouping was formed called the March 23 Movement (M23), named after the peace agreement concluded on 23rd March 2009 (Sadiki 2014). The movement, which caused a major internal crisis in the year of its inception,
remains to this day a strong player in the region, supported by Rwanda and considered its tool for interfering in the internal affairs of its eastern neighbour.

East African sub-regional organisations were also involved in peace brokerage at that time. The talks to maintain peace in the eastern Congo were conducted on the initiative of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR...), which in February 2013 managed to sign an agreement in Addis Ababa (Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for DRC and the region), concluded under the auspices of the United Nations, in the presence of the then UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, which was to finally end the fighting in the eastern territories of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Peace, Security...).

The document signed at the time prohibited support for rebel movements in the DRC and called for reforms to establish the rule of law. This agreement, promoted as a great success of the ICGLR, also did not bring an effective end to the conflict; neither did another proposal by the UN Secretary General presented at the UN Security Council in April of the same year to extend the mandate of the peace mission in the DRC by using the Intervention Brigade to combat armed groups.

The aforementioned initiative was then judged to be 14 years late, because that was the time the UN troops were trying to bring peace to eastern Congo, helpless in the face of the multiplicity of rebel groups, representing various (often contradictory) political and ethnic postulates; pacified and reborn under new names and with new leaders. Conflicts of a civil war character in the following years smouldered and erupted in various parts of the country: in Ituru, Kivu and Katanga. Human rights were drastically violated in each of them, and pervasive anarchy prevented effective humanitarian assistance (Kłosowicz 2017, 431, 447).

Peace mediation conducted at the initiative of the East African Community

The events of the following years have shown that the most effective element in restoring peace in eastern Congo turned out to be the stabilisation initiatives of neighbouring countries, Uganda, and Rwanda, for understandable reasons interested in restoring stability in the region (and thus securing its borders), and representing their interests and supporting their actions – The East African Community. It is worth making clear at this point that the insecurity of the Community’s western borders was an important factor influencing its policy towards the Democratic Republic of the Congo: first its efforts to restore peace and then to maintain stability in the region.

The crisis in eastern Congo has become a tangible proof that cooperation under the EAC, dominated by issues of economic development and mutual integration, can also be successfully implemented in matters related to the process of restoring peace in the region – both in the face of problems related to the challenges of the unstable Congolese border, as well as the issues of the legal protection and material status of refugees.

Since its establishment in 1999, the EAC has taken steps to create a framework and structures to resolve ongoing problems threatening the stability of the member states and the entire region. Measures for regional stabilisation, strengthening peace and security in the region are seen as conditioning the success of prioritized integration processes (Lizak 2012, 427).
The Strategy on Regional Peace and Security was adopted (EAC Peace…), and strategies for the elimination of trans-border crime and ensuring the safety of people and goods are being developed. These activities are based on article 124 of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community, which acknowledges the need for ensuring peace and security in partner states. The same article presents comprehensive plans aimed at having a stable and secure environment within the region, as well as for supporting the development and peaceful life for all East African peoples.

The EAC Council of Ministers appointed a group of experts and entrusted them with the task of developing a regional strategy for security with a supporting plan of its practical application. This strategy (Overview of Peace and Security Strategy) is concerned with common solutions for regional threats and ensuring the safety of citizens of Community member states, and was adopted at the Community Council of Ministers in November 2006, giving a green light for potential stabilisation interventions within the EAC (Overview of Peace…).

According to the strategy, the Peace and Security Sector is adapting dynamically to the nature and forms of constantly changing risks conditioned by technological advances, current issues of crime growth, and international political events. The Strategy is flexible enough to adapt to these changes and may be easily amended in order to take newly emerging challenges regarding security threats into consideration. The Strategy covers cooperation for the eradication of crime: car theft, drug trafficking, terrorism, so-called money laundering, and others.

Pursuant to the EAC Regional Strategy for Peace and Security, in order to tighten cooperation within the security sector, a Sectoral Council on Interstate Security was established. The adopted cooperation framework within international security, designed to supplement the existing bilateral agreements between security authorities within the region includes i.a. implementation of the Protocol on Illicit Drug Trafficking and cooperation on matters within the jurisdiction of a police force.

The EAC Secretariat coordinates implementation of common training programmes and activities for supervision of borders, as well as for increasing the efficiency of eradication of international crime. Law enforcement agencies in the EAC partner states cooperate with one another in order to stop trans-border crime-related activity, such as vehicle theft, smuggling, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. Relevant authorities cooperate on returning stolen property and the extradition of crime suspects. Operations undertaken within the security sector involve the development and implementation of an early warning and counteraction system in the case of a conflict, as well as launching works within the scope of the EAC Regional Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (Peace and Security…).

Matters of security within the region are directly related to the refugee issue, not only with respect to potential threats resulting from their influx, but also the legal protection and material status of the emigrants themselves. To resolve the problem, in March 2010, a treaty was signed between the East African Community and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) on cooperation of protection of emigrants’ rights, including, first and foremost, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons within the region (UNHCR, EAC…). One of the goals of the negotiations carried out at that time was to integrate international legal regulations with the domestic laws of the treaty’s parties.
As mentioned, among the members of the Community, Rwanda, and Uganda were the most interested in restoring stability in the eastern region of the Congo, for which the stabilisation of their western border has consistently been one of their national security priorities for over a quarter of a century. However, it should be emphasised that Rwanda, accused of using its interventions for its own interests, as well as abuses related to the flow of Congolese resources, for many years played the role of the only effective policeman, guarding the peace on the common border, at the same time recognising the need for effective legal regulations related to the flow of Congolese resources through Rwanda. Since 2011, the Rwandan government has been participating in a program to track and control potential smuggling routes for minerals found in trade. Rwanda has also been piloting the Certified Mineral Trading Chains (CTC) program since 2009, in partnership with the German Federal Institute of Geosciences and Natural Resources (Blore 2011). In addition, in a ministerial decree in March 2011 Rwanda has officially banned the trade in minerals of unknown origin on its territory.

Attempts at post-conflict reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The above-mentioned neglect of Mobutu Sese Seko’s many years of leadership concerned both economic problems and the negative effects of authoritarian leadership (Mobutu’s regime…). At the dawn of the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, Mobutu—like many other African leaders—faced new international rules that made the allocation of development aid conditional on the commencement of democratisation processes (Kieżun 2010).

Reluctant to share power with democratically elected representative bodies, he delayed reforms while trying to use the Rwandan crisis to maintain his position. Initially, he supported the intervention of France and actively participated in the attempt to maintain the regime of President Juvénal Habyarimana, and after the genocide, as requested by Western allies, he accepted refugees. However, the choice of ally turned out to be a political mistake; by supporting the interests of the Hutu, he indirectly joined the new Rwandan government with his political opponent Laurent Kabila and his Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre (AFDL).

Mobutu finally lost power to Laurent Kabila in 1997. Kabila, by declaring the initiation of the reform process for the stabilisation of the state and the adoption of a new democratic constitution, obtained foreign aid. However, as history has shown, these were sham actions.

Laurent Kabila, like his predecessor, exercised power authoritatively, banning the activities of political parties and the right to organise anti-government demonstrations. His downfall was caused by the rebellion that broke out in the eastern provinces of the country in 1998, supported by some of the former allies, and he himself was murdered in January 2001 (The Democratic Republic…).

President Kabila was succeeded by his son, Joseph, who managed to bring about a peaceful end to the so-called Second Congo War. The Pretoria Accord provided for the formation of an interim government to begin the process of separation of powers in the country. Pursuant to its provisions, in April 2003, the transitional constitution was adopted, and in July the activities of the interim government were launched. Ultimately, the constitution was approved in a referendum in 2005 and promulgated in 2006; according
to its provisions, a president elected for no more than two five-year terms is obliged to share his/her power with the prime minister, representing the interests of the largest party in parliament.

The commencement of the reform process once again initiated the opening of aid programmes aimed at rebuilding the country’s economy. However, the government of Joseph Kabila was not able to exercise real control over the entire territory of the state and the crisis in the eastern Congo, although apparently extinguished, smouldered throughout all the years of his presidency. The next presidential and parliamentary elections were held on time—in 2011. Though their results were questioned, the Supreme Court confirmed a favourable outcome for the incumbent president, which allowed Kabila to remain for a second term.

Kabila’s presidential mandate was due to expire at the end of 2016, after the end of the two terms allowed by the constitution. However, in line with the opposition’s concerns, the President delayed the holding of new elections on the pretext of the need for administrative reforms: reorganising the country’s administrative units, conducting a census, and then updating the voter register.

Fortunately for the country, the two-year government crisis ended without a civil war this time around. The presidential elections—although postponed several times—were finally held on 30 December, 2018. The outgoing president decided not to run in the elections.

The winner was Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi, a candidate with the support of the outgoing president. Despite complaints about the course of the election process and accusations that the election victory was secured in exchange for protecting the interests of Kabila and his associates, the Supreme Court upheld the election result. President Tshisekedi was sworn in on 24 January, 2019; it should be emphasised that the inauguration of this presidency was the first peaceful transfer of power in the Congo since the country gained independence in 1960 (*The Democratic Republic…*).

President Tshisekedi began real efforts to rebuild the country after the conflict, effectively strengthening his own position and that of his country in the international arena. In the years 2021–2022 he was the Chairperson of the African Union, while at the same time making efforts to having the DRC admitted into the East African Community.

Accession efforts were launched in June 2019 with an official request from the DRC President to the then EAC Chair, Rwandan President Paul Kagame. This request was granted on 27 February 2021 at the EAC Heads of State Summit, and in July 2021, in accordance with the procedures for the admission of new members, an appropriate verification mission was conducted in the DRC. The mission’s report was adopted in December 2021 at the Extraordinary Summit of EAC Heads of State, and the then-commissioned negotiations with the DRC on admission to the Community were conducted in January 2022 in Nairobi (Kenya). Kinshasa then formally confirmed its desire to join the Community and accepted the terms of accession (*Admission of…*).

The accession processes were therefore carried out quickly and efficiently, in accordance with the wills of both stakeholders. The Democratic Republic of the Congo became a full member of the East African Community after depositing its instrument of ratification with the Secretary General of the EAC on 1 July, 2022 (*The Democratic Republic of the Congo finally becomes…*). The ratification ceremony took place at the seat of the Community in Arusha (Tanzania).
By submitting the ratification document, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DRC, Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen ‘Apala, stated that the DRC’s admission to the bloc was like fulfilling the vision of the founding fathers of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, now the African Union), including Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and Patrice Lumumba, who wanted a strong, united and prosperous continent of open borders. He also added that the EAC is now seen as the most integrated sub-regional organisation in Africa.

In turn, the EAC Secretary General, Peter Mathuki, paid tribute to the DRC authorities, appreciating the smooth implementation of the internal and constitutional ratification processes of the Accession Treaty and the submission of the Instrument of Ratification by the specified date. Peter Mathuki confirmed that the DRC has been incorporated into cooperation with EAC partner countries in all sectors, programmes and activities that promote the main four pillars of regional integration: customs union, common market, monetary union, and political federation. The EAC Secretariat has developed a long-term programme for the integration of the DRC into the Community, with the active participation of the DRC and its delegated representatives to the EAC bodies, as well as an appropriate financial contribution as expected from each Member State.

As part of the agreement concluded with the new member, in September 2022 an agreement was concluded giving the symbolic green light to the deployment in the eastern provinces of the DRC of the EAC Joint Regional Force, led by the Armed Forces of the DRC in Eastern DRC. The relevant Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was signed in the capital of the DRC, Kinshasa. This agreement provides for the deployment of the EAC Joint Regional Force on the territory of the DRC for a period of six months, outlines their competences and defines the support provided by the government of the DRC. From the point of view of effective state reconstruction, this decision seems crucial.

This agreement was concluded with the support of President Tshisekedi who stated, that his “greatest wish is that the Regional Forces be successful and allow the country to turn around and focus on its economic and social growth, which will allow it to transform and shine in front of the world” (DRC President...). The anticipated economic growth will certainly be related to access to the Community market; the common external tariff framework; and preferential access to the seaports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam.

**Conclusions**

As mentioned, from the Community’s perspective the greatest benefit of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s accession to the East African Community will be probably preferential access to its rich natural resources. Equally important is the opportunity to have a real impact on the course of stabilisation processes in eastern Congo. On its official website, the Community lists further benefits for strengthening integration in the East African region. The accession of the DRC, with a population of more than 90 million, will expand the Community market and investment opportunities. Supporting infrastructure development in the DRC, taking advantage of its geographical location, will facilitate the connection of the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic trade corridor, while linking the DRC’s rail network to the EAC will create opportunities to increase access to the markets of all EAC countries, lowering intra-regional trade costs. Also appreciated, were plans to build the INGA Dam (a series of seven hydroelectric plants around the Inga Falls on the Congo
River, an Agenda 2063 flagship project) that can contribute to the East African Power Pool (*Admission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*…).

These arguments outweighed the doubts arising from the expansion of the community beyond regional borders and the threats resulting from the instability of the newly admitted state.

In the case of the decision to accept South Sudan, there were both geographical and historical reasons for enlarging the East African Community. While the border of the *sudd* marshes naturally hindered contacts between the Sudanese from the south and Arabs from the northern part of Sudan, the lack of a natural border has favoured contacts with their neighbours from the south for centuries, even if the outskirts of Sudan were peripheral for them (Bar 2016, 139–168).

However, when attempting to theoretically justify the admission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the regional bloc of East African states, we face serious methodological challenges, even though the geographical scope of the term ‘East Africa’ is not clear-cut. It is also comprises geographical, historical, and political concepts, the meanings of which are not the same.

The broadest of these is considered to be the geographical concept, according to which East Africa (more precisely: Eastern Africa) also includes the part of the Horn of Africa region which includes Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (Marcus). The historical concept of East Africa is somewhat narrower, covering only Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, possibly including Burundi and Rwanda, although the latter two countries are sometimes considered to be part of Central Africa (Birmingham). None of them covers reaching out to the Atlantic (and thus West Africa), the vast Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the attempt to fit this country within the borders of politically understood East Africa goes beyond the limits of common sense.

However, even ignoring purely theoretical definitions, it is necessary to point out the serious practical threats resulting from the instability of the Congo. However, even before the DRC was admitted to the Community, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi had to face the above-mentioned threats, and the accession to the Community forced the new member to adapt to Community regulations concerning attempts to effectively solve the problem.

The experience of Rwanda, admitted to the Community in 2007, indicates that accession can effectively foster stabilisation processes in the broadest sense. Moreover, it can contribute to economic growth (thereby reducing poverty levels) in the medium to long term. The potential costs that will arise in the short term can be mitigated with appropriate negotiations and internal reforms.

The benefits of admission to the Community must be properly exploited however, and accession alone does not guarantee a solution to internal problems – as can be seen in the example of Burundi, also admitted to the Community in 2007.

In October 2022, less than four months after the signing of the Ratification Documents, a new wave of insurgency flared up across the province of North Kivu, which has once again become the scene of violent clashes between the government army and rebel M23 Movement troops. Similar reports also appeared in the following months, January, and February 2023 (*DR Congo*…).

It is clear that the effective implementation of peace processes will take time and will not happen with the signing of the relevant agreements. Similarly, in the case of South
Sudan, the effective implementation of the peace process took many months after the country’s admission to the East African Community.

Instability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had lasted more than 2 decades. One of the reasons for its inability to be completed effectively was the lack of any real political will on the part of the country’s leadership. President Tshisekedi, however, has been given a historic opportunity to receive massive assistance from countries in the region to end internal conflict, rebuild the economy, and support the development of civil society. Let’s hope he puts it to good use.

References


